

**THE EFFECT OF MARITAL STATUS  
OF WORKING WOMEN ON  
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT  
AND WORK STRESS**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my beloved parents.

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On completion of this study, I wish to acknowledge my sincere thanks to the following people:

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## **ABSTRAK**

Penyelidikan ini telah dijalankan untuk memeriksa jawapan pekerja wanita yang sudah kahwin dan yang masih bujang tentang komitmen mereka terhadap organisasi masing-masing dan ketegangan kerja mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui soaljawab 102 wanita yang bekerja di Pulau Pinang. Dari contoh yang diambil, 43 adalah pekerja yang sudah kahwin manakala 59 pekerja masih bujang. Keputusan yang diperolehi menunjukkan bahawa pekerja wanita yang sudah kahwin mempunyai komitmen yang lebih tinggi terhadap organisasi mereka dan mengalami tekanan kerja yang lebih rendah. Keputusan ini dijelaskan oleh tanggungjawab yang lebih berat wanita yang sudah kahwin terhadap kerja dan keluarga dan pengharapan majikan yang lebih tinggi terhadap pekerja wanita yang belum kahwin.

## **ABSTRACT**

- This research was conducted to examine the responses of married and single working women on organizational commitment and work stress. Data was collected through questionnaire on 102 women working in Penang. Of the sample, 43 were married and 59 were single. The results indicated that married women are more committed and experienced lower level of stress at work than single women. The results are explained in the light of dual responsibilities of married women and greater expectation from single women at work.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the effect of marital status of working women on organizational commitment and work stress. The topic is of particular significance in view of the general acceptance of the belief that women as a group do not constitute "ideal worker", and much more so if they happened to be married with domestic and child rearing responsibilities. While no comparison is made between the responses of men and women on organizational commitment and work stress, degrees of organizational commitment and work stress are compared while keeping gender constant but varying the marital status. The general logic being that married women have greater burden of responsibilities when compared to single women and this may have some influence on their organizational commitment and experience of work stress. Hence, marital status is used as independent variable and scores on organizational commitment and work stress are taken as dependent variables.

#### 1.1 Literature Survey

This section surveys the relevant literature on the relationship of organizational commitment and marital status and work stress and marital status of working women.

#### 1.1.1 *Organizational Commitment*

As a work related attitude, organizational commitment has acquired considerable attention during the last decade. It refers to an attitude that reflects an individual's identification with and attachment to the organizations he/she works with. Strong attachment to organization makes an employee a true member of the organization who overlooks minor sources of dissatisfaction with the organization and sees self as still remaining a productive member of the organization (Barney and Griffin, 1992). A number of authors have put forward a number of definitions of organizational commitment. Most of these definitions comprise of such items as the identification with the organization, willingness to work hard and intention to stay with the organization for an extended period of time.

For purpose of this research, the definition provided by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) has been accepted. According to them, "organizational commitment is the relative strength with which an individual identifies with and gets involved in a particular organization." It has three primary components:



- (a) a strong desire to remain a member of a particular organization;
- (b) a willingness to exert high levels of effort on behalf of the organization; and
- (c) a definite belief in and acceptance of, the values and goals of the organization.

In other words, this is an attitude about employees' loyalty to their organization and is an ongoing process through which organizational participants express their concern for the organization and its continued success and well-being.

With recent trend of down sizing and automation, a large number of organizations have laid off a large number of workers. The result is a growing distance between employers and employees. A recent survey of American workers indicated that 63 per cent are less loyal to their organizations while only 22 per cent agreed to the statement, "compared to 10 years ago, employees are more loyal to their organizations." A full 50 per cent of those responding said that it was likely that they would change employer in next 5 years. "Workers have a right to be upset and angry. They have been bought and sold and have seen their friends and relatives fired and laid off in large

numbers. There is little bond between employers and workers any more." (Castro, 1989).

Organizational commitment had been found to predict turnover (Williams and Hazer, 1986). It has also been found that organizations whose members have higher levels of commitment show higher performance and productivity, and lower levels of absenteeism and tardiness (Bateman and Strasser, 1984; Morris and Sherman, 1981).

A large number of studies have been carried out to identify the determinants of organizational commitment. Such personal variables as age, tenure in the organization and personality predispositions as well as organizational variables such as job design and supervisory styles have been studied (Luthans, Baack and Taylor, 1987). Research evidence dealing with gender and/or marital status is scanty. Until the 1970s, few studies examined the potential competition for commitment and time between the organization and the family. Workers themselves often denied that these two major sources of psychological investment in their lives were in conflict (Piotrkowski, 1979).

Even though current research suggests more ways in which work influences the family than the family influences work, it is apparent that there is more potential reciprocity between work and family roles than has been reported in the literature to date. Neither the family nor work are closed systems.

A worker's commitment to his or her job, therefore, is the product of organizational support and family support, each operating somewhat independently.

It was proposed that work commitment is the result of gratifications received from several sources, including one's job and family. It was further proposed that organizations may be capable of increasing work commitment by providing support and the overall ability of the organization to influence workers' attitudes toward their jobs and their commitment to the organization. Organizations that increase family support activities are likely to benefit from those efforts.

Married women tend to be less committed to work since it was found that wives express anxiety about being more successful than their husbands (Poloma and Garland, 1970). On top of that, Horner (1971) found that women show a 'need to fail' so as to avoid antagonizing men.

It is expected that a woman will move if her husband's work requires a change, but not move for her own work opportunities if that would inconvenience husband's work (Linn, 1971). Therefore, married women may not be as committed as the unmarried women as they are more likely to have interruptions in career and reduction in productive time in their work.

#### 1.1.2 *Work Stress*

Interest in work stress and particularly in the impact of stress on people has its roots in medicine and particularly in the pioneering work of Hans Selye (1976<sup>y</sup>). In his search for a new sex hormone, he accidentally discovered that tissue damage is a non specific response to virtually all noxious stimuli. He called this phenomenon as General Adaption Syndrome (GAS).

According to Selye, all human beings have a nominal level of resistance to stressful events. Some can tolerate a great deal of stress while others can handle much less. GAS has three stages - alarm, resistance and exhaustion. When an individual first encounters a stressor, GAS initiates the alarm. If it persists, the individual moves into the resist-

ance stage. However, if stress continues for a long time, the exhaustion sets in.

Given the GAS cycle, a number of definitions of stress have been put forward. Perhaps the most broad based definition is one provided by Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) who defined stress simply as "the interaction of the individual with the environment". A more closer look at stress suggests that a more specific definition is needed. Hence, stress is defined as an individual's adaptive response to a stimulus that carries excessive psychological and physical demands (Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly, 1988). Generally, people under stress show behavior which is a deviate from the normal patterns of life. It is important to note that stress is neither anxiety nor nervous tension. Anxiety is purely psychological; while nervous tension is mostly physiological. Stress has components of both. Another important point is that people generally feel that stress is bad and damaging. The fact is that we all need some stress to perform. (Selye, 1974).

Stress can be caused by both individual and organizational/environmental factors.

Research conducted on female samples and their experience with stress is minimal. Studies that have been conducted on dual-career couples have found differential influence of work stress on men and women. Karambayya and Reilly (1992) collected data from both members of 39 dual career couples. Work and family involvement was used to predict job satisfaction, marital satisfaction, stress and work restructuring of both member of the couples. In general, couples whose members had high levels of family involvement were experiencing high levels of marital satisfaction and low levels of stress. The results also showed that man reported higher levels of stress when his partner was involved in her work, an effect that did not seem to appear significant for women.

Yet, in path analysis of the stress process for dual-career men and women, Guelzow; Bird and Koball (1991) collected data from 163 women and 149 men. Women in the study indicated being highly committed to their professions and combining full-time employment with marital and parental roles without consequent high levels of distress. Moreover, for these women, neither role strain nor stress was significantly related to having younger children, which suggests that they may be resolving some of

the guilt and role conflict as reported in previous studies by choosing to work full-time when their children are young.

In another study, Parasuraman, Greenhaus and Granrose (1992) examined the relationships among work and family role stressors. Using data gathered from 119 men and 119 women who were partners in a two-career relationship, they found that work and family role stressors were primarily related to job satisfaction and family satisfaction respectively, whereas work and family role stressors as well as work-family conflict were associated with overall life stress.

In general, most studies seem to suggest that women are perhaps more prone to experience the psychological effects of stress, whereas men may experience more physical effects (Jick and Mitz, 1985).

What do employees do to cope with the impact of stress? A study conducted by Myrtle, Glogow and Glogow (1988) examined factors that contribute to the stress experienced by public managers in Malaysia and the strategies that they use to cope with the stress. Data was collected from 26 executives, managers and senior staff of the Malaysian Ministry of Education attending a 10-day

executive development programme. The findings suggested that the respondents seemed better prepared to manage on-the-job stress than their counterparts in other nations or employment settings. Organizational policies, the requirements of the job and interpersonal relationships were found to be the major sources for dealing with stress. Most respondents were able to cope with their stress through on-the-job strategies and methods.

## **1.2 Purpose of Study**

This study does not test a hypothesis. It is an exploratory study which is intended to lead to hypothesis generation.

This study was carried out to examine the effect of marital status of working women on organizational commitment and work stress. It is an exploratory study as it deals with primarily women (in fact married women) in the state of Penang and their levels of organizational commitment and work stress. First of all, there are few studies on married women and most of them have been confined to developed countries. There does not seem to have any published study which has tried to study the influence of the marital status of working women in Malaysia on organizational commitment and work stress.



Working women has been selected as the unit of analysis because there is an increased labour force participation and involvement of women in the economic development of Malaysia. In 1970, women participation in the Malaysian work force was 31%; in 1980, it was 32.7% and in 1990, it rose to 35%. (Md. Zabid Abdul Rashid & Fariza Arifin, 1992).

Given the growing involvement of women and also given the growing number of married women participating in productive process, their organizational commitment and work stress may play a significant role in the national economy.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology of data collection, sample and procedure used in collecting the data.

#### 2.1 Measures

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts - statements measuring organizational commitment, work stress and some bio-graphic items.

##### 2.1.1 *Organizational Commitment*

Organizational Commitment was measured by using a modified version of the questionnaire developed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). The original questionnaire which consisted of 15 statements was reviewed by a group of seven MBA students to examine its relevance to the Malaysian context based essentially on the content, wording and coverage of the statements. This analysis revealed that 5 out of 15 items do not seem to tap the essence of Malaysian realities and hence, they were dropped from inclusion in the final questionnaire for this study.

The remaining 10 statements were translated in Bahasa Malaysia. The translated version was double checked by 5 undergraduate students to see if it conveys the same meaning as the original English version. Both the English and Bahasa Malaysia versions were presented to the respondents.

The respondents were asked to read the statements carefully and then indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the statements using the following scheme:

Strongly agree	= 6
Agree	= 5
Slightly agree	= 4
Slightly disagree	= 3
Disagree	= 2
Strongly disagree	= 1

The scheme was designed to exclude possibilities of neutral responses.

Statements 1 - 10 in Appendix 1 represent the organizational commitment questions.

### 2.1.2 Work Stress

Work Stress was measured through a 10-item questionnaire given by Moorhead and Griffin (1992). As in the organizational commitment questionnaire, these items were reviewed by the same group of seven MBA students to check their cultural consonance in Malaysian context. All of them were found acceptable on their face value. These items were also translated in Bahasa Malaysia and together with translation were presented to the respondents.

The respondents were asked to read each statement carefully and indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of them using the following scheme:

Strongly agree	= 6
Agree	= 5
Slightly agree	= 4
Slightly disagree	= 3
Disagree	= 2
Strongly disagree	= 1

The scheme was designed to exclude possibilities of neutral responses.

Statements 11 - 20 in Appendix 1 represent the work stress questions.

### 2.1.3 Demographic Profile

The questionnaire also sought information about their marital status and a few other bio-social variables. The final questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 1.

## 2.2 Sample

The final questionnaire was distributed to 140 women employees working in 29 organizations, representing both service and manufacturing sectors. The number of questionnaires sent/received by sector and the percentage of return are presented in Table 2.1. The data suggests that the percentage of return was higher from service sector as compared to manufacturing sector. The names of the organizations by sector are presented in Appendix 2. These organizations represented a variety of technology, products and services. Of the 140 questionnaires, 102 were completed and received by the researcher. Hence, the final sample consists of 102 women employees.

TABLE 2.1  
Return Rate of Questionnaires

Sector	Questionnaires		Return Rate
	Sent	Received	
Service	75	56	74.7%
Manufacturing	65	46	70.8%
Total	140	102	72.9%

### 2.3 Data Collection

The data was collected through the help of friendly intermediaries in manufacturing and service sectors. People known to researcher and in responsible positions were approached. They were explained the purpose and the scope of study. Once they agreed to cooperate, they were requested to have the questionnaire completed by a group of female employees. They were assured of the confidentiality of the data provided.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

#### 3.1 Demographic Profile

Of the 140 questionnaires, 102 were completed. This indicated a response rate of 72.9 per cent. While 29 organizations participated in this study, the number of respondents from each organizations varied from 2 to 8. The sample profile is presented in Table 3.1.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Demographic Profile**

Particulars		Married (N=43)	Single (N=59)	Overall (N=102)
1. Age:	$\bar{x}$	33.1	26.6	29.4
	S.D.	5.8	5.6	6.5
2. Number of children:	None	30.2%	N/A	30.2%
	$\bar{x}$	1.3	N/A	1.3
	S.D.	1.1	N/A	1.1
3. Age of youngest child:	< 3 years	43.3%	N/A	43.3%
	> 3 years	56.7%	N/A	56.7%
4. Years working:	$\bar{x}$	10.7	4.3	7.0
	S.D.	6.2	4.4	6.1
5. Job level:	clerical	41.9%	45.8%	44.2%
	official	58.1%	54.2%	55.8%
6. Sector:	Manufacturing	46.5%	44.1%	45.1%
	Service	53.5%	55.9%	54.9%

$\bar{x}$  = mean; S.D. = standard deviation estimates

Based on the data presented in Table 3.1, the following statements could be made:

- \* Of the 102 respondents, 42.2 per cent are married and the remaining single.
- \* The average age of married respondents is 33.1 years. For single respondents, it is 26.6 years. The average age for the overall sample is 29.4 years.
- \* Of the 43 married women, 30.2 per cent do not have children. Of the remaining 30 married women, the average number of children is 1.3.
- \* Forty three point three per cent of these married women with children have their youngest child less than 3 years old.
- \* The average years of working experience for the overall respondents is 7.0 years, with the average years of working experience for the married and single women, 10.7 years and 4.3 years respectively. Consistent with the average age, the married women also have more average years of working experience than the single women.
- \* Since a small per cent of the working women is at the managerial level, they have been clubbed together with



the category 'official'. The ratio of those at clerical and official level is balanced with 44.2 per cent and 55.8 per cent respectively in the sample.

- \* More women are working in service sector than in manufacturing sector. There are 54.9 per cent in service sector as compared to 45.1 per cent in manufacturing sector.

### 3.2 Organizational Commitment

Inter item correlation was calculated amongst the 10 statements on organizational commitment to see if they hang together. The purpose of this analysis was to see if the statements measured the same concept as perceived by the respondents. The coefficient values of inter correlation are presented in Appendix 3. Since all the 10 statements significantly correlate with all the other statements, the individual score of these 10 statements were added to get a single score for each of the respondents. The score varied between a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 60. There were two questions which were negatively worded. The scores on these two statements were reversed before addition in order to make them consistent with other statements.

The averages and standard deviation estimates of married and single women in the sample are given below:

	$\bar{x}$	S.D.
Married	43.67	7.75
Single	40.07	7.53

The results suggest that married women have greater degree of organizational commitment than single women.

To see if marital status interacts with such variables as years of experience, job level and sector, a two way analyses of variances for unequal number of cases in each cell were calculated. The results are presented in Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

**TABLE 3.2**  
Analysis of Variance  
Years of Experience by Marital Status

	SS	df.	MS	F
Years of experience	.01	1	.01	0.00
Marital status	324	1	324	5.49*
Interaction	5	1	5	0.08
SS Error	5808	98	59	
SS Total	6137	101		

\*  $p < .05$

**TABLE 3.3**  
Analysis of Variance  
Job Level by Marital Status

	SS	df.	MS	F
Job level	53	1	53	0.91
Marital status	324	1	324	5.59*
Interaction	65	1	65	1.12
SS Error	5695	98	58	
SS Total	6137	101		

\*  $p < .05$

**TABLE 3.4**  
Analysis of Variance  
Sector by Marital Status

	SS	df.	MS	F
Sector	4	1	4	0.07
Marital status	324	1	324	5.68*
Interaction	186	1	186	3.26
SS Error	5623	98	57	
SS Total	6137	101		

\*  $p < .05$

The results in Tables 3.2 to 3.4 suggest that marital status of the respondents shows a significant difference in organizational commitment. (Married women are significantly more committed to the organization than single women). Neither the level of experience\*\* nor job level and sector individually or in interaction with marital status show any significant main or interaction effect.

### 3.3 Work Stress

The inter-correlations amongst the 10 statements on work stress were also calculated to see if they hang together. The inter-statement coefficients of correlations are given in Appendix 4.

Of the 10 statements, statement 6 (item no. 16 in Appendix 1) does not correlate with other statements at all, while statements 1 and 7 (item no. 11 and 17 in Appendix 1 respectively) correlate with two and one other statements respectively. Given their absence of relationship with large number of statements, they were dropped from the final results. The scores of the remaining seven statements were added together to get a single measure of work stress.

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\*\* The average score of years of experience were used to classify low and high categories of experience. Those above average were called high and those below average were classified as low.

The score varied between a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 42. The averages and standard deviation estimates of married and single women in the sample are given below:

	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
Married	15.39	4.44
Single	17.52	4.93

The results suggest that single women have greater degree of work stress.

To see if marital status interacts with such variables as years of experience, job level and sector, a two way analyses of variances for unequal number of cases in each cell were calculated. The results are presented in Tables 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7.

**TABLE 3.5**  
Analysis of Variance  
Years of Experience by Marital Status

	SS	df.	MS	F
Years of experience	31	1	31	1.34
Marital status	113	1	113	4.91*
Interaction	60	1	60	2.60
SS Error	2192	98	23	
SS Total	2396	101		

\*  $p < .05$

**TABLE 3.6**  
Analysis of Variance  
Job Level by Marital Status

	SS	df.	MS	F
Job level	36	1	36	1.59
Marital status	113	1	113	5.00*
Interaction	35	1	35	1.55
SS Error	2212	98	23	
SS Total	2396	101		

\*  $p < .05$

**TABLE 3.7**  
Analysis of Variance  
Sector by Marital Status

	SS	df.	MS	F
Sector	111	1	111	4.99*
Marital status	113	1	113	5.08*
Interaction	0	1	0	0.00
SS Error	2177	98	22	
SS Total	2401	101		

\*  $p < .05$

The results in Tables 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 indicate that single women experience significantly more work stress than married women. Marital status does not interact with years of experience and job level in producing work stress.

While sector does not interact with marital status (see Table 3.7), but by itself, it does make a